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## THE INFLUENCE OF PSYCHOLOGY UPON THEOLOGY

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The application of psychology to the interpretation of religious experience is no new thing. The two most impressive instances of this are Augustine's *Confessions* and Edwards' *Treatise concerning the Religious Affections*. In Augustine the moral and religious consciousness is subjected to the most subtle and exhaustive analysis, the various forms of sin are hunted down through all the devious and intricate labyrinths of passionate and conflicting desire, and of will which both purposes and is baffled by its own mysterious contradiction. It is as if one were admitted to the holy of holies where the soul alone with its redeeming God searches, lays bare, and tests all its most hidden thoughts and feelings in the light which reveals and judges, condemns or forgives. It is indeed a *Via Dolorosa*, an *Imitatio Christi*, a spiritual prototype of the *Pilgrim's Progress*. Edwards' *Treatise concerning the Religious Affections* moves not so much in the region of autobiographical self-analysis as in the sphere of objective experience. After premising that the true religion in great part consists of holy affections, i.e., in vigorous and lively actings of the will or inclination, he subjects the ordinary signs that a work of grace is real to incomparably keen and subtle inquiry, and then proceeds to exhibit the universal and essential characteristics of truly gracious and holy affections. The theology here may be defective, the ideal too mediaeval and individualistic, but never have the inner qualities that mark the Christian life been searched out and described with more exact and penetrating psychological analysis than in Edwards' *Treatise*.

Such psychology as the church possessed would have influenced theology much more than it has but for two serious hindrances. In the first place, many phenomena found their sufficient explanation in their aloofness from general human experience; they were

miraculous and hence were referred not to men but to God. Prophecy "in its narrow sense as prediction" has been defined as the "foretelling of future events by virtue of divine communication from God."<sup>1</sup> This is not conceived as contravening any laws of the human mind, yet whatever may be true of these laws, the secret of the prediction lay in a miraculous action of the divine will upon the human mind. Inspiration has been defined as such an influence of the Spirit of God upon the sacred writers, that every statement of these writers was infallibly accurate, whether "scientific, historical, or geographical."<sup>2</sup> This is indeed asserted only of the "original, autographic text."<sup>3</sup>

Another class of phenomena from which the aid of psychology has been precluded comprises those which were referred to the presence and power of evil spirits. In the Old Testament, e.g., were such cases as that of the evil spirit which tormented Saul<sup>4</sup> and the evil spirit which came between Abimelech and the Shechemites.<sup>5</sup> In the New Testament the number and malign power of evil spirits as demons is vastly augmented. Theology has provided an elaborate angelology, in the lowest orders of which demons are classified, their functions defined, with capacity of controlling men second only to that of God himself. Like the Spirit of God in the Westminster Confession, these spirits work when and where and how they will, and psychology could no more account for their seizures and obsessions than it could for a thunderbolt.

Other phenomena are taken out of the range of human action and referred to God as their sole cause. The most striking instance of this is the doctrine of regeneration. This has been defined as a "change wrought by creative power in the inherent moral condition of the soul."<sup>6</sup> In this change "God recreates the governing disposition," "the soul being rightly said to be passive with respect to that act of the Holy Spirit whereby it is regenerated." The "operation is miraculous and therefore inscrutable."<sup>7</sup> Here then

<sup>1</sup> A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, I, 134 (Philadelphia, 1907-9).

<sup>2</sup> C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, I, 163 (New York, 1871-73).

<sup>3</sup> Hodge and Warfield, *Presbyterian Review*, II, 245.

<sup>4</sup> I Sam. 16:14-15.

<sup>5</sup> Judg. 9:23.

<sup>6</sup> A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Christian Theology*, 464 (New York, 1878).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 458, 460, 464.

is a point from which, as in Edwards' treatise on the religious affections, psychology has been excluded. Accordingly, regeneration has its theological but not its psychological history. There is predestination of some to salvation, based on the absolute divine decree, there is utter impotence of the fallen will, an atonement sufficient for all but efficient for the elect only, and there is irresistible grace—"the efficacious operation of an extrinsic agent."<sup>8</sup> Yet even here psychology was not so completely ignored as appears at first sight. Two questions were raised, first, in respect to the proper improvement of the appointed means of grace, which became a question of harassing, even torturing perplexity, and secondly, the exceeding variety in the manner and circumstances of the Spirit's operations, sometimes more secret and gradual, and from smaller beginnings than at other times.<sup>9</sup>

The psychological approach to theology has not, however, been so badly blocked as the suggestions already made seem to imply. From two different directions—if indeed the two apparent directions are not really different aspects of the same movement—profound influences have been at work. First, from the Socinian and Arminian interest which has been ever jealous for the human element in the Scriptures and religious experience. Whatever of one-sided emphasis has been due to these sources, they have provided a necessary and wholesome corrective of an overweening supernaturalism in the Augustinian and Calvinistic attitude toward the Scriptures and the Christian life. Still further, in our own country movements in Calvinistic circles—so far as there have been such—have all been in the same direction. Dr. Edwards said that his father, President Edwards, and those associated with him had made ten improvements in theology. The very names of these improvements will indicate their character: (1) the ultimate end of the creation, in which the son said that President Edwards had reconciled the happiness of the creature with the glory of the Creator; (2) liberty and necessity; (3) nature of true virtue; (4) origin of moral evil; (5) doctrine of the atonement, in which the consciousness of the divine authority and of the pardon of sins was

<sup>8</sup> J. Edwards, *Works*, V, 45 (New York, 1830).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

protected; (6) doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin and of Christ's righteousness; (7) the state of the unregenerate, the use of means, and exhortations which ought to be addressed to the impenitent; (8) nature of experimental religion; (9) religious affections as disinterested; (10) regeneration.<sup>10</sup> Until the middle of the nineteenth century the battle raged around these questions, and around others more central still—the explanation of sin in a moral universe, natural and moral ability, and the human nature of Christ. The singular thing here is that every one of these questions is not theological but anthropological. It is a sign of the new day. Man is coming to his own. He has vindicated his rights even in a theological system.

The impulse which has been operative in these ways has been active in other directions also. First, with reference to miracles. Here the point of view has changed from the objective and theological to the subjective and psychological. Hume started the ball rolling which seems not yet to have found a resting-place at the bottom of the hill. He held that since acceptance of the miracle depends on testimony, and no testimony is credible which conflicts with universal experience, i.e., the uniformity of nature, some other than the traditional explanation must be provided. Paulus discriminated two elements in the narrative—the purely natural and credible, and that which was due to fancy or imagination. Strauss distinguished the pure religious idea from the representation of that idea in religious history; miracles were events changed into legends or ideas changed into myths. Renan affirmed not that the miracles were impossible but that hitherto none had been established. F. A. B. Nitzsch describes a miracle as an event which makes on the pious consciousness the impression of an immediate interference of God in the course of events, whether on more serious consideration this event appears to be supernatural or not. Thus the stress of the inquiry lies not as formerly in relating the event to God but to the human mind. This may be seen in its most characteristic and thoroughgoing presentation in discussions concerning the resurrection of Christ, and particularly by Strauss in his *Leben Jesu*, by Keim in his *Die Geschichte Jesu von Nazara*, and by Lake

<sup>10</sup> *Works of Jonathan Edwards, D.D.*, I, 481-93 (Boston, 1842).

in his recent treatise on *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*. The common starting-point is a belief that Jesus made himself known to his disciples after his death; the assumption is not, however, that this belief represents an objective fact in the traditional sense, but the entire energy is devoted to an inquiry as to how such a belief arose in the consciousness of the disciples, and concerning its present meaning for faith.<sup>11</sup>

A like significant process marks the modern study of Jesus Christ. Time was when the doctrine of his person was defined in terms of metaphysics—nature, essence, hypostasis, and the like. Even so highly concrete experiences as his knowledge of particular events, his temptation, his agony in the garden, and his death were thought to be explained with reference to two metaphysical natures and their relation to each other. A profound change has, however, taken place in the approach to the study of Christ. At first the new path was not selected with full consciousness whither it led. Strauss, to whom more than to anyone else this movement was due, had divested Christ of his divinity, and had at the same time threatened to rob him of what was highest and best in human life. To the defense of this priceless consciousness came Ullmann with his *Sinlessness of Jesus* (although at first written with a different aim), Bushnell's well-known tenth chapter in his *Nature and the Supernatural* on the "Character of Jesus," followed by a notable galaxy of treatises with the object of interpreting this wonderful life in terms of human qualities raised to their highest power indeed, yet identified with what is essential to the ideal man. Such books as H. N. Bernard's *Mental Characteristics of the Lord Jesus Christ* (London, 1888); J. Stalker's *Imago Christi* (New York, 1890); and J. A. Broadus' *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York, 1890), would have been as impossible to Origen, Athanasius, and Anselm as Professor James's *Psychology* would have been to Aristotle. Now that the transition has come to pass, no one fancies that the old wine is better. Every commentary on the gospels, every fresh life of Christ, and treatises on single aspects of Jesus' life take for granted the potency of the psychological approach to the New Testament presentation of him. Nor must we overlook the light cast on this

<sup>11</sup> Cf. G. A. Gordon, *Religion and Miracle* (Boston, 1910).

supreme personality by Ritschl who sought the evidence of Christ's divinity in his love for men, in his dominion over the world, and his success in establishing his community with attributes like his own; who also summed up the work of Christ in his personal vocation, in his likeness to his followers, in his personal representation of God to men and of men to God, and in his continued action in the state of exaltation with the same qualities which marked his earthly life. Here again is no transcendental metaphysics, but an inquiry every stage of which proceeds on the basis of experience and the unquestioned data of the New Testament. One may fairly ask whether this exhausts the presentation of the New Testament; but no one doubts that it gathers up and makes available for the Christian life material which has been too much ignored—material which would not have been even discovered but for the psychological approach.

Other fields have yielded rich harvests by the same process of culture. For example, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus is not yet relieved of all mysteries, but it is no longer regarded as purely miraculous and therefore utterly inscrutable, but submits itself to psychological analysis in a way similar to other striking conversions, as those of Augustine and of J. H. Begbie's *Twice-Born Men*. Demoniacal possession is another problem to which psychology has at length furnished the key. Medical science has indeed been appealed to and its verdict has been rendered in no ambiguous terms. On the other hand, missionaries have told us that demoniacal possession is still a fact in China and in other lands,<sup>12</sup> and an elaborate demonology has been worked out to account for these pathological conditions. For all such phenomena, however, psychology holds it unnecessary to look beyond the human subject for the explanation. First of all the stories are accounted for by the fact that the authors of them believed that the phenomena in question were due to "possession"; secondly, the experiences thus described had in part a physical basis, but even more than this, so far as they were nervous disorders, a mental basis. Semler was among the first to attribute these phenomena to natural causes; and more recently Charcot in France and Hammond and Prince

<sup>12</sup> Cf. J. L. Nevius, *Demon Possession* (Chicago, 1895).

in America have shown that so-called possession is due to some form of hysteria and that when curable it yields to suggestion.<sup>13</sup> Having proceeded thus far, by the logic of the situation psychology cannot halt; it must knock and gain entrance to every unusual or abnormal form of religious experience. Accordingly, everything is yielding to psychological treatment. We have the psychology of visions, of dreams, of ecstasy, of stigmatization, of speaking with tongues, and even of the phenomena referred to the Holy Spirit.

The directions in which psychology may be expected hereafter to be particularly influential in theology are genetic psychology and psychology of the subconsciousness. Genetic or functional psychology offers itself for the solution of problems which concern the individual and the race. Nowhere, perhaps, will its aid be more cordially welcomed than in the explanation of sin. The traditional doctrine of sin is that of "original sin." This is defined as a corruption of nature caused by the sin of Adam, transmitted by natural generation, of which all actual sins are a consequence. Every one is, therefore, of his own nature wholly inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit and thus deserves wrath and damnation. This is claimed as the teaching of the Scriptures.<sup>14</sup> Now psychology has a perfectly definite and unmistakable testimony on the subject.<sup>15</sup> First, the racial experience in which sin emerges goes back to the natural impulses and instincts of animal ancestors which in these are non-moral and not abnormal. There was and is in human life a period in which voluntary action, however different from what the perfected moral law requires, takes place without the consciousness of moral law and is therefore without sin. It is an unreflecting expression of nature or in response to custom. When, later, moral sentiment is born and moral sanctions appear, acts which once were innocent are now seen to be wrong and are judged to be sin. Secondly, as a fact of individual experience, sin is pictured by the apostle in the most vivid form in Rom., chap. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. Charcot, *Les maladies du système nerveux* (Paris, 1886-87); J. Charcot and P. Richer, *Les démoniaques dans l'art* (Paris, 1887); W. A. Hammond, *On Certain Conditions of Nervous Derangement* (New York, 1883); M. A. Prince, *The Dissociation of a Personality* (New York, 1908).

<sup>14</sup> See especially Rom. 5:12-19; 2:10-12; I Cor. 15:21-22.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. F. R. Tennant, *The Origin and Propagation of Sin* (Cambridge, 1906).



The various customary interpretations of this passage unite in a common affirmation, that the "flesh" here spoken of, whether that of the unrenewed or of the renewed man, is universally corrupt and sinful and the opposition between the flesh and the spirit absolute. By psychology, however, this alleged condition receives a very different interpretation. Its significance lies in its description of a "divided self," a condition which is not essentially sinful but natural. Augustine in his *Confessions* (Book VIII) has given an accurate account of a like experience, only less vivid and masterful than that of Paul. The several features are, (1) at the outset of each individual life are natural impulses and instincts which are non-moral and therefore innocent, and (2) the development of moral sentiment is partly through suggestion and imitation and reflection, awakening an ideal from within—between these impulses and the moral sentiment a conflict is inevitable; (3) added to this, habits have been forming in which the natural impulses and instincts are already organized into energetic action, and these resist control by the personal, social, and divine ideal; (4) still further, not infrequently the thorough ethicizing and unifying of the inner personal forces is rendered more difficult by pathological conditions and by an unfavorable environment. Psychology will never eliminate sin from the seventh chapter of the Romans, but it will remove from it the veil of mystery and dogmatism in which it has been shrouded by theology.

Even more significant for theology in the field of genetic psychology is that view of religion which regards it as the conservation of value, of social value, of the highest social values. All these values have been built up in the customary activities of primitive peoples and have originated in the practical requirements of the life-process or in the joyous impulses spontaneously arising in social relations. The activities were already in existence before men had become aware of their value for the social body or the individual life. Once the sense of these values had emerged, the attitude of mind in which it was enshrined and the activities by which it was created are henceforth mutually conditioned—differences of attitude being due to the different conditions of which they are the product. Thus the consciousness of values or the

religious ideas as symbolized in ceremonials, sacrifices, prayer, divine personalities, ethical monotheism, and, indeed, with whatever of content, are referred to the social *milieu* for their origination and meaning. This view places under contribution ethnology, folklore, observations of travelers among nature peoples, and the history and comparison of religions. Since, however, the Jewish and Christian religions can claim no exemption from the law according to which the highest social values have been reached in other religions, the Old and the New Testaments as historical documents and the customs and mental attitudes there recorded must be judged by the same criteria which are applied to all religious practices and values among other peoples. It would be difficult to exaggerate the influence of these psychological postulates upon the exegetical, historical, and dogmatic interpretations of the Scriptures and upon Christian experience in general.<sup>16</sup>

A further application of psychology deals with those experiences which are held to involve the subconscious. Some instances of this have already been referred to; two others may be suggested. The first involves inspiration and prophecy. Here the investigation is naturally concerned with consciousness of the prophetic call, premonition, prescience and prediction, revelation, dreams, vision, audition, ecstasy, and inspiration.<sup>17</sup> As a precondition of the prophetic call the man must be the child of his nation who becomes perforce its critic and statesman-judge, gifted with extreme sensitivity in respect to good and evil in the ethical life of his people, with a temperament corresponding. Premonition paralleled even if not equaled in many modern psychic phenomena is a real mental experience originating in a finer although self-unconscious adjustment of the individual to his environment. Revelation is a sudden, mysterious awakening of mind, an "up-rush" from the subjective to the objective mind, due to intense mental excitement, on account of its unpremeditated and startling emergence referred to God. Inspiration—a product of tempera-

<sup>16</sup> Cf. H. Höffding, *Philosophy of Religion* (London, 1906); I. King, *The Development of Religion* (New York, 1910); E. S. Ames, *The Psychology of Religious Experience* (Boston, 1910).

<sup>17</sup> J. H. Kaplan, *Psychology of Prophecy* (Philadelphia, 1908); cf. G. L. Raymond, *The Psychology of Inspiration* (New York, 1908).

ment, genius, enthusiasm—discloses itself in an eloquence so far surpassing the ordinary capacity of the prophet, that it is easily referred to a higher power. The other phenomena are similarly explained. Whatever limitations beset such attempts to give reality to the events in question, they at least point the way we are going.

The most recent endeavor in the same line is concerned with the person of Christ. It was inevitable that sooner or later the disclosures of psychology in relation to the subconscious should be made to do service in solving the age-long problem of traditional christology. And this is indeed the line adopted by a widely known scholar and theologian who has for many years been engaged in studies preliminary to writing a life of Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup> His two propositions are, (1) that the subliminal consciousness is in all men and also in Christ the sphere of the indwelling and activity of the Deity, and (2) that the line between the two natures of Christ is to be drawn not perpendicularly as has been the case traditionally, but horizontally, between the conscious and the subconscious. The consciousness and experiences of Jesus were strictly and genuinely human. Only in his subliminal consciousness which was continuous with the life of God are we to look for the presence of Deity in him. This Deity is evidenced by the wealth of latent powers gradually and at last in fullest degree at the end of his life disclosed, particularly by his announcement of the new law, his forgiveness of sins, his claim to superiority to the greatest ones of the past, and his promised reward to those who have served his disciples. Yet the divine nature made only such expression of itself as was possible through the "narrow neck" of the human consciousness. Finally, it is held that this interpretation is just to the historical data—the manhood and the Godhead in Jesus. One can only express the hope that the learned propounder of this hypothesis will not allow it to vitiate a work which promises to be of high value in the interpretation of the historical Jesus.

A pair of suggestions may be added. First, the tendency is to be deprecated which refers the secret of the divine action wholly to the subconsciousness. It is a legitimate presupposition that

<sup>18</sup> W. Sanday, *Christologies Ancient and Modern* (New York, 1910).

the subconscious is, quite as fully as the conscious, the sphere of the natural. To limit the divine to the subconscious appears to involve a return to the occultism of the earlier assumption of miraculous action, even although the language employed to discuss the phenomena is that of science. I believe that we are to seek a more subtle analysis of the conscious processes which precede the phenomena in question, and there ascertain the source of the changes and expressions of the subconscious.

The other suggestion relates to the limitations of this method of approach. One wonders at times whether psychology will eliminate religion altogether—to say nothing of God. It might be that psychology would be so confident of its sufficiency or so oblivious of its essential restrictions as to leave no room for the philosophy or metaphysics of religion. In that event it would only follow the wake of other over-confident young sciences. A longer experience will broaden its vision, sober its arrogance, and enable it to correlate its results with other assured findings of human intelligence.